THE JEPHTHAH PANEL IN THE BEMA OF THE CHURCH
OF ST. CATHERINE'S MONASTERY ON MOUNT SINAI

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I

IN the bema of Justinian's basilica within St. Catherine's monastery every inch of the eastern wall above the marble revetment of the apse is covered with mosaic: the conch proper is filled with the representation of the Metamorphosis on Mount Tabor, surrounded by a frame containing medallions of the apostles and prophets; the triumphal arch is adorned with what must be considered the earliest depiction of the Deesis, consisting of a medallion of the Lamb of God, flanked by two angels and medallions of the Virgin and John the Baptist; the wall space above, to the left and right of a double window, is devoted to two scenes representing Moses before the burning bush and Moses receiving the tablets of the law.[1] Ever since Kondakoff, in the first remarks about the style of the mosaic, placed the two Moses scenes in a period considerably later than the rest,[2] some scholars, like Wulff,[3] have accepted this verdict, and recently Guillou has voiced the opinion that part of the mosaic, and especially part of the inscription, was the result of a modern restoration.[4] The first investigation of the mosaic at close range, from a scaffold, was undertaken between 1958 and 1963 by the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedi-

tion and resulted, first, in securing the Christ figure to the wall, from which it had become disassociated, and, second, in cleaning the surface and making a detailed photographic record.[5] These measures established that the surface of the mosaic as a whole was in a remarkably good state of preservation; that an older restoration in the nineteenth century had used only paint and no cubes; and that the surface was perfectly homogeneous from the technical point of view and showed no suture of any kind—evidence which led us to believe that the mosaic must have been made within a rather short period. Furthermore, since old inscriptions incised in capital letters on two beams mention the death of Theodora and implore the salvation of the Emperor Justinian,[6] everything speaks in favor of the mosaic's having been made and completed within Justinian's lifetime, in one major, concerted effort to decorate lavishly the bema of the church.

Following the completion of the mosaic, it was apparently decided to enlarge the program, and the artist commissioned with this task found an unusual place for some additions (fig. 1). On the marble revetment of the pilaster to the left of the apse he depicted the Sacrifice of Isaac in encaustic technique.[7] Since it has been published and

[1] V. Beneševič, "Sur la date de la mosaïque de la Transfiguration au Mont Sinaï," *Byzantion*, 1 (1924), p. 145 ff. *Idem, Monumenta Sinaitica Archaeologica et Palaeographica*, fasc. 1 (Petrograd, 1925), p. 3 ff. and pls. 2–7. G. Sotiriou, μωσαϊκὸν τῆς Μεταμορφώσεως τοῦ Καθολικοῦ τῆς Μονῆς τοῦ Σινᾶ, *Atti dello VIII Congresso Internazionale di Studi Bizantini*, 2 (Rome, 1953), p. 246 ff. and pls. LXXIV–LXXXVIII.

[2] N. P. Kondakov, *Putešestvie na Sinaj v 1881 godu* (Odessa, 1882), p. 75 ff.

[3] O. Wulff, *Altchristliche und byzantinische Kunst*, 2 (Berlin, 1914), p. 75 ff.

[4] A. Guillou, "Le Monastère de la Théotokos au Sinaï," *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire*, 67 (1955), p. 217 ff.

[5] This work was executed by Mr. Ernest Hawkins, the experienced restorer of the mosaics of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, at the instigation of the Byzantine Institute of America under the directorship of Prof. Paul Underwood, and by Mr. Fred Anderegg, from the University of Michigan, who was the supervising photographer of the expedition.

[6] H. Grégoire, "Sur la date du Monastère du Sinaï," *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*, 31 (1907), p. 333 ff.

[7] In Nov. 1963, two Greek restorers, Mr. Tassos Margaritoff and Mr. Stauros Papageorgiou, tested the surface with a powerful micro-

described in detail by Maria Sotiriou,[8] my remarks on this panel (fig. 3) will be chiefly supplementary. Although the surface, especially of the central figure of Abraham, is fairly badly rubbed, the red-brown preliminary design and what remains of the color and the high lights of the garment are sufficient to permit a clear comprehension of almost every detail of the composition. The narrowness of the panel[9] forced the painter to make the altar only about a third as wide as it is high. The uppermost part of the altar is covered with a red altar cloth bearing a design of a cross in a square. The ram, not easy to recognize, stands erect on its hind legs, behind Abraham. Isaac, inscribed along his left elbow ICAAK, is dressed in a long, red chiton patterned with yellow circles and kneels on the altar with his arms fettered behind his back, while Abraham, inscribed ABPAAM, his face averted, grasps the boy's hair and prepares to plunge a knife into the boy's shoulder. A bending tree at the left, with a cone-shaped mass of dark green foliage on which a yellow design is superimposed, is counterbalanced by a cone-shaped flame next to Isaac's head. The fire and some faggots between Abraham and Isaac are suspended in a paratactic manner that reveals the painter's difficulty with the spatial relations of the various elements required by iconographical exactness. Instead of the more frequently depicted hand of God, three yellowish rays issue from an arc of heaven, suggesting a trinitarian symbol, as do the three concentric stripes that border the arc of heaven. One feature not previously noted is the black horizontal line that divides a lighter lower zone from a dark olive-colored one above. This line can only demarcate a wall; the connotation being that the scene is taking place within a kind of sacred precinct. The artist has underlined the distinction between the two zones by depicting three big six-pointed stars in the upper one as a suggestion

that above the wall one can see the star-studded sky, thus preserving an element of classical illusionism.

Standing in the bema in front of this panel, I reasoned that if there is a panel on the pilaster to the left, there should also be one on the pilaster to the right, because, in the decoration of the sanctuary of a Christian church, scenes from the Old Testament as prefigurations of Christ's sacrifice usually occur in pairs rather than alone. A well-known example is at S Vitale in Ravenna, where the Sacrifice of Isaac, together with the Hospitality of Abraham, occupies one lunette, while the pendant lunette depicts Abel and Melchizedek bringing sacrifices; in S. Apollinare in Classe, Abel, Melchizedek, and Abraham with Isaac are fused into one panel.[10] However, the pilaster at the right would not be easy to investigate. In front of it stands St. Catherine's tomb (fig. 2), a covered marble chest that contains the two reliquary boxes holding the skull and one hand of the saint, placed under a marble baldachin surmounted by a wooden cupola. To enrich the decoration around this *locus sanctus* an icon of the Cretan School of about the seventeenth century, depicting the standing St. Catherine wearing a red garment and the imperial loros, was set against the pilaster in a heavy, multicolored, rococo marble frame of the early eighteenth century.[11]

The top of the marble decoration is tilted and does not touch the pilaster proper. By climbing a ladder I could look behind the decoration, and I was able to discern behind the upper left corner an arc of heaven corresponding to the one at the upper right of the Abraham panel; furthermore, part of a head with a nimbus was visible. Thus I was certain of the existence of another encaustic

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scope and some solvents and confirmed that the technique was encaustic.

[8] Maria G. Sotiriou, "Τοιχογραφία τῆς θυσίας τοῦ Ἀβραὰμ τοῦ Καθολικοῦ τῆς Μονῆς Σινᾶ," Ἀρχαιολογικὴ Ἐφημερίς, 1953–54, pt. III (1961), p. 45 ff.

[9] The panel is between 153 and 154 cm. in height and between 81 and 82.5 cm. in width.

[10] M. van Berchem and E. Clouzot, *Mosaïques chrétiennes du IVe au Xe siècle* (Geneva, 1924), figs. 190, 191, and 208.

[11] There is a marble slab on the wall connected with St. Catherine's tomb which says in Greek and in Arabic that the marble revetment was renovated under Archbishop Athanasios of Neaouse in the year 1715 by the hand of Narsalla from Damascus. This date may well apply also to the marble frame of the icon. Cf. M. H. L. Rabino, *Le Monastère de Sainte-Catherine du Mont Sinaï* (Cairo, 1938), pp. 27 and 103, nos. 30 and 31.

panel underneath the St. Catherine icon. In 1960 the icon was temporarily removed, and, indeed, part of a human figure became visible (fig. 5). Mr. Carroll Wales, the icon restorer of our expedition, cleaned the surface and removed spots of plaster, revealing the lower part of a soldier clad in a short olive-colored tunic and armor with leather strips—a soldier in typical Roman battle dress. He stands, shod in high black leather boots, with one foot on rocky ground and the other on the bottom step of a structure. Enough was revealed to indicate clearly that the soldier had just drawn his sword out of its sheath. Since he figures as a companion to Abraham, one would have expected him to be another worthy from the Old Testament, and to be involved in an action which, like the Sacrifice of Isaac, would be a prefiguration of Christ's eucharistic sacrifice. While it was possible to think of great warriors, like Joshua and Gideon, none of them seemed to meet the second qualification, that he serve as a eucharistic prefiguration.

II

During our third campaign in the fall of 1963 we obtained the gracious permission of Porphyrios III, Archbishop of Sinai, to have the marble frame removed so that the identity of the soldier might be revealed.[12] Mr. Ernest Hawkins was invited to come to St. Catherine's once more, and in less than two weeks[13] he removed the marble frame and cleaned and consolidated the painting. Here follows his own account of the work:

[12] I wish to express my very sincere thanks to His Beatitude, the Archbishop, for his most liberal attitude and also to Pater Gregorios, his secretary, for his energetic support and profound interest in our work. The present plan is to re-erect the marble frame on the wall to the right of the pilaster, at about the same height, over the door that leads from the room south of the bema into the chapel of the Forty Martyrs of Sinai. Thus the icon of St. Catherine when replaced in this frame will remain in close vicinity to her tomb.

[13] From October 24 until November 5. I wish to thank Mr. Hawkins most cordially for having carried out this arduous work with great devotion and also for having given me permission to publish his detailed statement.

The painting was made upon two, paired marble revetment panels, .83 m. wide (.405 and .425) and 1.56 m. high. These are of the same series as those on the concave wall of the apse and predate the mosaic above. It was covered by an icon of St. Catherine mounted in a rococo frame of four colors of marble 2.75 m. high and one meter in width (at the vertical sides). The lowest part, a rectangular panel, has been left in position but the eighteen pieces of the upper parts of the frame have been taken down and removed for temporary storage in the new museum room in the south wing of the Monastery.

The frame was attached to the wall with iron pins, either round or square (approx. .012 X .012 m.). The top two pins were even heavier. The marble revetments were cut away roughly to allow the thicker pieces of the frame to be recessed below the general level. Where necessary, at the top and down the center, holes were chopped through the revetment to make passage for the pins to enter the masonry of the wall. These damaged the panels severely, particularly on the (south) right-hand side where radiating cracks occurred, and in places the marble was fractured into loose pieces. As the frame was removed these were secured in their original positions by small cramps of 3 mm. copper wire or reattached with plaster which was also used to build up the lost sides of the panels.

The iron pins were secured in the masonry of the wall and in the back of the pieces of the frame with molten lead, a large quantity of which ran down and, in some places, adhered to the back of the frame. Gypsum plaster was then also poured down between the back of the frame and the wall to consolidate the fixing.

The frame was removed by cutting away the plaster with a hammer and chisel and, where necessary, by sawing through the iron pins and chiselling away the lead packing. Where possible the pins were removed completely.

Some areas of paint were entirely lost, particularly where the hot lead had been poured. The surface was first cleaned with the blade of a fine spatula to remove the plaster etc. and later worked over with small swabs, care being taken not to dislodge the surviving paint which in places tended to be in small loose flakes. Steps were taken to prevent further losses.

The pigments were generally rather thin but those representing flesh were built up quite thickly. The painting has survived almost as well as that on the opposite side of the sanctuary which was precisely similar in character.

Soon after the cleaning of the panel had begun (fig. 4)[14] an inscription came to light. Perfectly preserved, it leaves no doubt as to the identity of the soldier, an identity which probably no one would have guessed. The letters, which are placed to the left and right of the nimbus, read O AΓIOC HEΦΘAE, thus sanctifying the man who, according to Judges II : 30–40, killed his own daughter, having vowed that he would sacrifice "whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me," if he returned victorious from his battle against the Ammonites.

In spite of its damaged state—the paint has flaked off to about the same degree as in the Abraham panel—the composition is quite clear in most of its details. Only toward the lateral edges is the panel comparatively more rubbed, and a few pieces of marble are lost there. Fortunately, the main action is quite centered on the axis, which is dominated by the figure of Jephthah. Dressed, as already mentioned, as a Roman soldier, he wears over his armor a chlamys of a quite intense red, covered with a white circle pattern. The chlamys is held in place by a circular clasp over the right shoulder. His head is covered by a yellowish helmet, whose neckpiece, probably meant to be of leather, falls softly over his shoulder, and whose peak touches the outline of the similarly colored nimbus. This outline, painted in red and studded with

white dots, is one of many details the panel has in common with the Abraham panel. The head is inclined and the eyes follow the gruesome action. With his left hand Jephthah has grasped the thick, black, flowing hair of his daughter, pulling her head back, and he is cutting her throat with one stroke of his sword which he holds in the other hand. His raised right elbow is held in a very angular position. Not much more of the child is left than her head, with the eyes opened wide in an expression of terror. Her exact pose can no longer be determined, but it is a fair assumption that she was kneeling and so formed a perfect counterfigure to the kneeling Isaac.

Actually, the space available could accommodate no more than a rather small kneeling figure, because a good deal of space is consumed by three clearly discernible cubes, one on top of the other (fig. 6), which constitute an altar shaped very much like that in the Abraham panel. The middle cube, in front of which Jephthah's right foot rests, has an arched opening for a firebrand, while the cube at the top, like its counterpart, is covered with a red altar cloth. The ground beneath the left foot is painted black, white, red, and olive, the four basic colors that were used for the panel as a whole. Precisely as in the Abraham panel, a horizontal line at the height of Jephthah's shoulder marks the termination of a wall, and above it one sees again the dark sky with a six-pointed star and, in the upper inside corner, an arc of heaven, from which three rays are directed toward Jephthah. In other words, this scene of sacrifice, like the other, is thought of as taking place within a sacred precinct. Nothing more needs to be said to make it clear that the Abraham and Jephthah panels were composed as perfect counterparts, oriented toward the altar which stands between them in the center of the bema.

Where did the artist come from who painted these two panels—both of them seem unquestionably to have been done by the same hand—at approximately what time did he do them, and to what kind of workshop did he owe his training? Since the panels are meant as an expansion of the apse program, it is appropriate to compare their style to that of the mosaic. In the latter there is no figure of a soldier to compare to Jephthah, but a

[14] My own measurements of the panel are: 156.5 cm × 82.5 cm. The slight difference from Mr. Hawkins' measurements is easily explained by the fact that the two marble slabs do not form a perfect rectangle.

suitable comparison can be made between the two patriarchal figures, Abraham (fig. 3) and the Moses of the Transfiguration (fig. 7).[15] A marked difference between the two is immediately apparent: the figure in the mosaic is well-proportioned, firm in its stance and dressed in a garment that helps to model the body and give it a high degree of physical reality. The folds are designed with economy and quite realistically. The gestures and the glance out of the corners of the eyes suggest a person in perfect control of every movement and aware of the outside world. By contrast, the figure of Abraham of the encaustic panel is unsure in its proportions, flattened out, and heavy in the hips; the effect is one of massiveness without a convincing physical reality. There are more folds and highlights than in the Moses figure, but both are less well organized, a bit overcrowded and patternized. The poor state of preservation deters us from going into further detail, but these few general remarks may suffice to demonstrate that the artist's work is not only considerably inferior in quality, but oriented differently from the mosaicist's. The decorative treatment of the unreal altar, the paratactic design of tree, fagots, and fire cone, the *horror vacui*, the delight in patternization, as it appears, for instance, on the tunic of Isaac—all these elements seem to indicate that the artist came from a totally different environment. Thus we are sorry not to be able to agree with Mrs. Sotiriou, who sees more similarities than differences and considers panel and mosaic to be contemporary and Syro-Palestinian. In our opinion, these differences transcend those of mere artistic personality and reflect a more general distinction between the refined style of the capital and the forceful but somewhat rustic style of the province.

A much closer connection exists, in our view, between the two marble panels and some icons, and, indeed, a priori one would

expect that the commission for an encaustic painting would be given to an icon painter familiar with that technique. This, then, would suggest that our marble panels were done by an artist used to painting human figures at a smaller scale, and this, in turn, would explain the relative insecurity with regard to human proportions, an insecurity particularly striking when one compares Abraham and Jephthah with any figure in the apse mosaic.

In the old library of St. Catherine's monastery, now used for icon storage, there is an icon, unfortunately very badly damaged, which depicts the bust of the Virgin holding in her hands an oval-shaped disk bearing a bust of Christ (fig. 8).[16] As the result of a vertical crack down the center, two-thirds of the Virgin's face and almost all of the bust of Christ are lost, and the surface not only has flaked but has become blackened, probably by fire. Thus the color of the Virgin's maphorion is no longer discernible, but one would expect it to have been purple or blue. The nimbi of the Virgin, Christ, and the two framing angels are all yellow, as a substitute for gold, and the ground of the oval against which the bust of Christ is set and the backgrounds of the two angels are red. Although the surface is too badly damaged for us to appreciate the artistic quality of the icon, there are nevertheless a few characteristic features visible which establish a very close affinity indeed between the icon and our marble panels. The Virgin is inscribed in black letters H ΑΓΙΑ ΜΑΡΙΑ, and above each half of this inscription is an ornamental star consisting of six points, each one of which has as a finial two strokes and a dot;[17] this is precisely the star form of the panels. In addition, the background is sprinkled, in both icon and marble panels, with less ambitious, rosette-like filling motifs composed of seven dots. Furthermore, the paintings have in common the pearl-studded outlines of the nimbi. All these features look like trademarks of a particular workshop. Though a comparison with regard to the treatment of the folds is

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[15] In the photographic reproduction in G. Sotiriou, "Tὸ μωσαϊκὸν," pl. LXXVI a, the figure looks very distorted, particularly in the position of the feet, thus giving the impression of an extreme clumsiness which it does not possess at all in the original. Our fig. 7 also looks slightly distorted. The actual impression intended can best be seen in the reproduction in color in the *Nat. Geog. Magazine* (Jan. 1964), pp. 107–109.

[16] G. and M. Sotiriou, 'Εἰκόνες τῆς Μονῆς Σινᾶ (Athens, 1956 and 1958), text, p. 42, and pl. 28.

[17] Mr. and Mrs. Sotiriou erroneously state that the monogram of Christ is above the Virgin's inscription.

more difficult, the Virgin's maphorion does show an abundance of parallel curving and straight folds that cover the surface quite evenly and are not unlike those of Abraham's mantle, while being distinctly different from those of the well-organized drapery of the Moses figure in the mosaic. It may be mentioned in passing that this Virgin icon was quite certainly the center of a triptych. There are holes in the upper and lower, but not in the lateral, sides of the frame; these holes were meant to hold wooden strips to which wings were fastened with pins. This system is still intact in a number of tenth-century ivory triptychs,[18] and several pairs of early triptych wings on Sinai suggest that the triptych form was very common as early as the pre iconoclastic period.[19]

Mr. and Mrs. Sotiriou, without giving a specific date for it, have included the Virgin icon in their chapter that deals with the icons of the seventh to ninth centuries. In my opinion, a date close to the earlier limit is more probable, i.e., in the seventh century, and there hardly seems to be any reason to go further forward, into the eighth century, although it must be admitted that a completely reliable system of dating such early icons has not yet evolved from a systematic study of all the early Sinai icons. If I am not mistaken, the technique is encaustic, though a scientific test has not yet been made, and if it is, this fact would militate against moving the date too far forward. Perhaps even more important than trying to narrow the date limits any further is an attempt to ascertain the place of origin. Since the icon is so closely related to the marble panels, it might even have been made on Sinai, although it is unlikely that this monastery in the rocky wilderness had a marked style of its own: the real problem is where the style is rooted. Mr. and Mrs. Sotiriou consider the Virgin icon to be an Egyptian work par excellence, while Mrs. Sotiriou

considers the Abraham panel to be of Syro-Palestinian origin. Their verdict with regard to the former is based primarily on the inscription Η ΑΓΙΑ ΜΑΡΙΑ, which, it is true, occurs frequently in Egyptian fresco painting —at Baouit, for example. From this fact it has often been concluded that every painting with this inscription is either Egyptian or related to Egypt. However, since it does occur elsewhere, for example on the mosaic of the Panaghia Angeloktistos in Kiti (Cyprus) and on a fresco in S. Maria Antiqua in Rome,[20] works of art that have no visible stylistic connection with any of the known Egyptian examples, there seems to be no cogent reason for attributing our icon to Egypt on the basis of the inscription. Neither does the iconography solve the problem, since this very type of Virgin occurs not only at Baouit, but also in the Roman fresco already mentioned and, furthermore, in the Syriac Bible in Paris, cod. syr. 341,[21] and the Armenian Gospel from Etschmiadzin.[22] In spite of the ruinous condition of the icon, the style can be seen to be quite different from that of contemporary Egyptian works like the frescoes of Baouit.

Two of the workshop devices that occur in our paintings, the dotted rosettes as an all-over pattern for the background and the pearl-studded nimbus outlines, are found on another Sinai icon, which depicts the *Chairete*, the Meeting of Christ with the two Marys after the Resurrection (fig. 9). Deviating from the text of St. Matthew's Gospel (28: 9–10), the icon represents one of the two Marys as the Mother of God instead of as Mary, the mother of James, as is made clear by the monogram inscription, which once more reads Η ΑΓΙΑ ΜΑΡΙΑ. In my previous discussion of this icon[23] I pointed to the

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[18] A. Goldschmidt and K. Weitzmann, *Die byzantinischen Elfenbeinskulpturen*, 2 (Berlin, 1934), p. 46, pl. XXVIII, no. 72a; p. 66, pl. LIV, no. 155a.

[19] For a discussion of early icon triptychs, see K. Weitzmann, "Fragments of an Early St. Nicholas Triptych on Mount Sinai," *Festschrift for Sotiriou* (Τιμητικός Γ. Σωτηρίου), Δελτίον τῆς Χριστ. Ἀρχ. Ἑταιρείας, 4th Ser., pt. 4 (1964), p. 18 ff.

[20] For both, see Kondakov, *Ikonografija Bogomateri*, 1 (St. Petersburg, 1914), pls. IV and V and figs. 149 and 214. For the S. Maria Antiqua fresco, see also A. Weis, "Ein vorjustinianischer Ikonentypus in S. Maria Antiqua," *Röm. Jahrb. für Kunstgesch.*, 8 (1958), p. 17 ff.

[21] H. Omont, "Peintures de l'Ancien Testament dans un manuscrit syriaque du VIIe ou du VIIIe siècle," *Monuments Piot*, 17 (1909), p. 93, and pl. VI, no. 7.

[22] J. Strzygowski, *Das Etschmiadzin Evangeliar*, Byzantinische Denkmäler, 1 (Vienna, 1891), pl. VI.

[23] K. Weitzmann, "Eine vorikonoklastische

Gospel of Rabula as the closest iconographical parallel—in it too the Mother of God replaces Maria Jacobi—and to the lid of the reliquary casket in the Sancta Sanctorum treasure in the Vatican as the closest stylistic parallel. The latter is obviously a memento from the holy places of Jerusalem, a fact that once more focuses attention on Palestine as a likely center for our workshop. The figures of the *Chairete* icon appear more formalized than those on the casket, as the result of a greater simplification of the garments—as far as the rubbed surface permits any judgment at all—and the facial expressions are more abstracted. Therefore, a slightly later date than that of the Virgin icon, perhaps in the early eighth century, should be proposed for the *Chairete*, although, to repeat, all dates suggested here are more or less tentative.

A third Sinai icon that, in my opinion, must be considered a product of the same artistic province depicts the Three Hebrews in the Fiery Furnace (fig. 10).[24] Each of the Hebrews wears a lacerna decorated with an all-over circle pattern. It is true that each individual circle is delineated by a series of dots and not, as in the previous examples, by a continuous line, and that the circles are not as densely spaced as on Isaac's tunic and Jephthah's chlamys. Yet the decorative effect is quite similar, particularly since the circles are set against the same kind of intense, deep red ground. The relatively greater restraint in the patternization may indicate that the Three Hebrews icon is somewhat earlier than the marble panels, an impression which is strengthened by a comparison of the draperies. The very marked fold over the hip of the angel in the Three Hebrews icon suggests a certain degree of plasticity and at the same time does not really model the body, as do the folds of Moses' garments in the mosaic. The long drawn-out high lights have a greater vitality than those covering the Abraham of the marble panel, a difference that can be explained as being the result of a comparatively better understanding of the classical

tradition. Mr. and Mrs. Sotiriou have dated this encaustic icon in the seventh century, a date with which I agree, and as provenance they suggest Palestine, a localization which also, in my opinion, is the most likely one. To point out a Syro-Palestinian connection, an iconographical observation may be of some significance. The angel of the icon holds in his lowered right hand a staff that terminates in a cross,[25] a proleptic suggestion that the Three Hebrews were saved by the cross. This same detail occurs on the sixth-century Murano diptych in the Museo Nazionale in Ravenna, a work that generally is considered to be the product of a Syro-Palestinian school of ivory carvers.[26]

There are still other Sinai icons that have a workshop connection with those considered so far—notably one of the Crucifixion, including the two thieves, inscribed Demas and Gestas.[27] Not only the background but also the colobium of Christ and the maphorion of the Virgin show the dotted rosettes, and the nimbi have the familiar pearl-studded edges; but the weakening of the organic structure of the bodies and the more summary treatment of the garments point to a somewhat later date. In the present context we will have to be content simply with having established a coherent group of early icons without pursuing all its ramifications. Suffice it to say that the Crucifixion icon also shows the monogram H ΑΓΙΑ ΜΑΡΙΑ and that, here again, this is not an adequate basis for proving an Egyptian origin.

To sum up our stylistic and iconographic observations, the center of gravity for this group of icons as well as for the marble panels seems to be Palestine rather than Egypt, and Palestine would most certainly be synonymous with Jerusalem. One would *a priori* expect a connection with Jerusalem: Sinai is a *locus sanctus* on the pilgrimage road to the Holy Land and played this role as early as the fourth century when the pilgrim Etheria visited both. As the head of a Chalcedonian monastery in a Monophysite environment, not only does the abbot of Sinai look to Jeru-

Ikone des Chairete," *Festschrift für Johannes Kollwitz* (in the press), the first published article on the icon. Here also the problem of the H ΑΓΙΑ ΜΑΡΙΑ inscription is discussed.

[24] G. and M. Sotiriou, Εἰκόνες, text, p. 26ff., and pls. 12-13.

[25] For this detail, see *ibid.*, pl. 12.
[26] W. F. Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters* (Mainz, 1952), p. 64 and pl. 39, no. 125.
[27] G. and M. Sotiriou, *op. cit.*, pl. 25.

salem for support, but when a new abbot is to be enthroned as archbishop of the autonomous Sinaitic Church, the ceremony of enthronization is even today performed by the Patriarch of Jerusalem.

III

No other representation of Jephthah himself or of any event from his life is known to us from the Early Christian period, and yet scenic illustrations must have existed in early Bible illustration, because they do occur in the Octateuchs of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, manuscripts whose dependence on Early Christian archetypes cannot be doubted. As a matter of fact, the eleventh chapter of Judges is illustrated in these manuscripts in some detail—to be precise, with nine scenes. The first four occur in all the copies but one: in the Cod. Vat. gr. 747, Cod. Vat. gr. 746, Vatopedi 602, and the now lost Octateuch of Smyrna, the only one fully published;[28] the exception is the copy in the Seraglio, which has no illustrations whatsoever for the Book of Judges. As soon as Jephthah was made captain of the Gileadites, he sent messengers to the King of Ammon (11: 12); the first scene illustrates this episode, and the second shows the King receiving Jephthah's messengers (11: 14–15). Next we see Jephthah making the fatal vow which later leads to the sacrifice of his daughter (11 : 30–31), and immediately thereafter is depicted the defeat of the Ammonites (11: 32–33). In all these scenes Jephthah is shown not in soldier's garb, but wearing a tunic and mantle like a patriarch or prophet, the type of person also suggested by the flowing hair and long beard. That he has a nimbus does not necessarily make him a saint but, as in the case of other persons in the Octateuchs, including even the King of Ammon, only a man of distinction. In the next scene, preserved in Cod. Vat. gr. 746 and the Octateuch in Vatopedi,[29] Jephthah is met by his daughter with timbrels and dancing as she steps out of his house (11 : 34), while Cod. Vat. gr. 747, the

best and earliest witness among the Octateuchs,[30] depicts in a somewhat similar composition the next phase of the same episode (11 : 35–36). Here Jephthah expresses his grief not by rending his garment as the text suggests, but by covering his face as if weeping, while his daughter raises her hand in a gesture of speech that signifies her consent to be sacrificed and expresses her resignation, further visualized by the fact that her head is veiled. A scene within the same frame shows the daughter, high up in a mountain retreat, bewailing her virginity in the presence of other daughters of Israel (11 : 38). Also preserved only in Cod. Vat. gr. 747 is an illustration of the defeat of the Ephraimites by the Gileadites in a battle directed by Jephthah from behind the front (12 : 4–6), while Cod. Vat. gr. 746 stands alone in depicting the burial of Jephthah (12 : 7).

The fact that there is no complete agreement in the choice of the episodes within a group of manuscripts which surely belong to the same recension can be explained only by the existence of a model with a cycle larger than that preserved in any individual copy, and there are other indications within the Octateuchs that point to a fuller archetypal picture cycle. What must seem most surprising is the absence of the representation of the actual sacrifice in the face of the fact that scenes of much less importance, like the exchange of messengers, occupy so much space. In the following paragraphs I shall try to produce some evidence that, indeed, the representation of the sacrifice was known in Eastern Bible illustration and therefore may have existed in the archetype.

The earliest representation of this episode in Western book illumination does not occur before the end of the twelfth century. In a codex in Munich, Clm. 14159, which was written between 1170 and 1185 in the scriptorium of Regensburg-Prüfening, there is a series of line drawings made for a text of "De laudibus sanctae crucis," which includes the episode among others from the Old Testament assembled for typological reasons (fig. 11).[31]

[28] D.-C. Hesseling, *Miniatures de l'octateuque grec de Smyrne* (Leiden, 1909), figs. 327–330.

[29] Photos of these and the following scenes in the Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University.

[30] K. Weitzmann, *The Joshua Roll* (Princeton, 1948), p. 31 ff.

[31] A. Boeckler, *Die Regensburg-Prüfeninger Buchmalerei des XII. und XIII. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1924), pp. 38, 96, and pl. XXXI.

Here Jephthah is depicted as an old man dressed in richly embroidered royal robes, yet wearing a helmet; while brandishing a sword he places his left hand on the head of his daughter, kneeling opposite him on the altar in a submissive pose that resembles the proskynesis. This is basically the same compositional scheme found in the Psalter of St. Louis in Paris, Bibl. Nat., cod. lat. 10525, which was executed in Paris in the third quarter of the thirteenth century (fig. 12).[32] Here the scene is part of a narrative of the Jephthah episode and is preceded by scenes of the victor's return from battle as a knight on horseback and the jubilant reception by his daughter, as well as by a representation of the mourning of the daughter and other women in the mountain retreat. In conformity with the taste of the thirteenth century, the composition is modernized in that Jephthah is dressed in the chain armor of a Crusader knight. Closely related to the Psalter is a set of Old Testament illustrations in the Morgan Library in New York, Cod. M. 638, part of a Parisian manuscript that in all likelihood was likewise made for St. Louis, perhaps a little earlier, around the middle of the thirteenth century (fig. 13).[33] The decapitation scene is preceded by the same two scenes of the jubilant reception of the sad victor and the mourning of the daughter with other women in the mountains; but the illustrator places the daughter in front of, instead of on, the altar, and her pose is more upright and not quite as submissive. Jephthah is depicted in a short tunic rather than armor, but in agreement with the other compositions he is brandishing the sword with which he intends to decapitate his daughter, who kneels in front of him.

Yet a fourth illustration is quite different, though it is in a manuscript likewise associated with St. Louis. I refer to the Bible in the Bibliothèque d'Arsénal in Paris, Cod. 5211 (fig. 14).[34] In contradistinction to all the representations described above, Jephthah approaches his daughter from behind and, holding her by her long, flowing hair in order to bend back her head, is about to plunge a dagger into her throat. This is precisely the action involved in our encaustic panel, the only changes—minor ones—being the replacement of the long sword by a shorter dagger and the placing of the daughter in front of, instead of on, the altar. Furthermore, Jephthah is dressed as a soldier, not in the outfit of a Crusader as in the St. Louis Psalter, but in the traditional Roman plate armor with pteryges and leather strips over a short tunic, an attire for which once more our encaustic panel provides the only parallel. Even in such small details as the arched opening to be filled with firebrands in the base of the altar the two representations are in agreement. This accumulation of similarities leads one to believe that the miniature in the Arsénal Bible stands in the same iconographic tradition as our panel.

Now, Hugo Buchthal has argued convincingly that the Arsénal Bible was made in a Crusader scriptorium in Acre, most likely for St. Louis while he was in Syria between the years 1250 and 1254. Furthermore, in tracing the iconographic sources Buchthal demonstrates their duality: while harking back to the same tradition of Parisian miniature painting on which the St. Louis Psalter and the Morgan picture Bible depend, the illustrators made just as great use of such Byzantine Biblical manuscripts as the Octateuchs of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, which have already been discussed above, and the Books of Kings manuscript in the Vatican, cod. gr. 333. If this connection cannot be shown equally strongly for other books of the Old Testament, the reason is merely that no illustrated copies of some of them have survived, although good evidence can be adduced that they once did exist.[35] Thus it becomes more than likely that the Jephthah picture of the Arsénal Bible also goes back to a Byzantine Octateuch, particularly since in the Samson scenes on the same page the connection with Byzantine Octateuch miniatures is most obvious, as Buchthal has shown.[36] To

[32] H. Omont, *Psautier de Saint Louis* (Paris, [1902]), pl. LIV.

[33] S. C. Cockerell and M. R. James, *A Book of Old Testament Illustrations of the Middle of the 13th Century* (Cambridge, 1927), pl. fol. 13ᵛ.

[34] H. Buchthal, *Miniature Painting in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Oxford, 1957), pp. 54ff., 60 note 4, 146f., and pl. 68.

[35] K. Weitzmann, "Die Illustration der Septuaginta," *Münchner Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst*, 3/4 (1952/53), p. 96ff.

[36] Buchthal, *op. cit.*, pls. 68 and 149a and c.

sum up, the fact that the scene of the sacrifice proper is not preserved in any of the existing Octateuchs does not militate against its existence in the archetype, since there is evidence that none of the Octateuchs has preserved the original cycle to the full extent. The Arsénal Bible presupposes the availability of a Greek Octateuch in Palestine and, to be more precise, in Acre.

If the assumption of an Octateuch miniature as the ultimate source for the Jephthah panel is correct, then one would expect the same source for the Abraham and Isaac panel. Indeed, there are striking similarities between it and the corresponding sacrifice scene in the Smyrna Octateuch (fig. 15),[37] the Octateuch in the Seraglio, and the Vatican Cod. gr. 746: Abraham is depicted in a similar striding pose with his head averted, the chief difference being that the voice from heaven comes from the opposite corner. Especially close is the rendering of the figure of Isaac, who kneels with his hands fettered behind his back and his hair in his father's grasp. The greater length of the tunic in the panel is insignificant, and the shifting of the dagger so that it is aimed not at Isaac's throat but at the back of his shoulder can easily be explained by the narrow format; there can be little doubt that throat-cutting, as illustrated in the miniature, was the traditional method of sacrifice and therefore the method depicted in the archetype. Similarly, the depiction of the ram on all fours is the more natural and more traditional rendering; his rampant position in the marble panel is due, once more, to lack of space. Furthermore, the placement of the kneeling Isaac in front of the altar seems to reflect the archetype, whereas his depiction on an altar of accumulated cubes was an expedient and resulted in the removal of the flame from the altar proper and its suspension higher up in the background. All these slight inconsistencies point up the difficulties of a painter of limited skill in adjusting a model with a compositional layout, like that of the miniature, to a changed format, and this situation applies to both panels alike.

The Octateuch of Smyrna, like that of the Seraglio, was surely executed in Constantinople. Yet, I have elsewhere tried to demon-

strate, on the basis of the scene of Joseph in prison, which iconographically agrees with an Early Christian incised marble relief from Antioch, that the Octateuch recension is of Syrian origin.[38] Since Syria and Palestine are artistically closely related, so much so that art historians are used to working with the term "Syro-Palestinian art," it is very likely that the two encaustic panels in Sinai have their iconographical roots in a narrative Bible illustration of Syro-Palestinian origin.

IV

A problem still to be solved is why Jephthah's infanticide was chosen as a prefiguration of Christ's eucharistic sacrifice, as it obviously was, since it was designed as a counterpart to the Sacrifice of Isaac. Although the typological explanation of the latter is a common subject in patristic writing and therefore became quite a familiar theme in the decoration of the altar rooms of Christian churches—S Vitale and S Apollinare in Classe in Ravenna are good examples—the mention of Jephthah's sacrifice is comparatively rare, and in the representational arts, as has already been stated, no parallel from the Early Christian period is known at all. The ideological difference between the Lord's temptation of Abraham and subsequent prevention of the sacrifice on the one hand, and Jephthah's unsolicited vow and actual slaughter of his daughter on the other, is only too obvious.

At the outset it must be made clear that Jephthah's sacrifice was understood by all older Jewish and Christian writers alike as a burnt offering. The idea that the daughter was not really sacrificed, but only dedicated to perpetual virginity does not occur before the end of the twelfth century.[39] The pictorial evidence of our encaustic panel and of the Romanesque and Gothic miniatures described above supports the early interpretation of the sacrifice as a bloody one. To Jewish writers the very existence of a human sacrifice was uncomfortable to think of, since it so obviously contradicted the Mosaic law. Flavius Jo-

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[37] Hesseling, *op. cit.*, pl. 27, fig. 80.

[38] Weitzmann, "Die Illustration," p. 103 f. and figs. 5 and 6.

[39] T. K. Cheyne in *Encyclopaedia Biblica* (New York, 1899–1903), II, col. 2359 ff.

sephus, for example, speaks of Jepthhah's sacrifice as "neither sanctioned by the law nor well-pleasing to God" (*Ant. Jud.*, V, 7 and 10). The only mention of Jephthah in the New Testament (Hebr. 11 : 32) is in connection with the enumeration of various heroes of faith, and the sacrifice of his daughter is silently passed over.

Likewise, the commentaries of the Church Fathers, like that of John Chrysostom in his Homily XIV, *Ad populum Antiochenum*,[40] can hardly be taken as an exculpation of Jephthah's sacrifice. Chrysostom calls the sacrifice a sample of providence and clemency because it prevented future vows of this kind from being made and consequently also further infanticides. For this very reason God did not prohibit it. Jephthah is thus made an instrument of God's providence, but this hardly qualifies him for the sainthood to which he is raised by the inscription and the nimbus on our panel.

Theodoret also, in the *Quaestiones ad Judices*,[41] struggles hard to find some explanation for the Lord's condoning of this sacrifice. He calls Jephthah's promise outright foolishness and, having excused him by suggesting that he had expected a dog or a donkey to be the first to emerge from his house, rather than his daughter, he adduces evidence from the Psalms (106 : 37–38) and Ezekiel (16: 20–22) that human sacrifices were really an abomination. According to Theodoret, it is Jephthah's daughter who is praiseworthy, and God permitted her slaughter only in order to teach how vows should be—or rather, should not be—made. In other words, the bloody sacrifice was allowed to take place for no other reason than to establish a deterring example—an explanation that is basically not very different from that of John Chrysostom and does not bring us any closer to the reason for our encaustic panel.

If anywhere, we had hoped to find some elucidating comment in the writings of Anastasius Sinaita, a monk of Sinai who lived in the seventh century; he was at the monastery at about the time the panel was executed, and he could not have missed seeing it while attending services in the church. To the

question, "Why did God not prevent Jephthah from sacrificing his daughter as he did Abraham?" he answers: "Because he had not emulated Abraham's piety; had he done so his sacrifice would likewise have been accepted benevolently in spite of his foolish vow.... Neither was the father [i.e. Jephthah] worthy of the mercy shown Abraham because of his lack of faith and in spite of his repentance, the rending of his garments, and lamentation, nor was the daughter worthy of that mercy, which was shown to Isaac, in spite of her unholy grief and wailing for two months.. God permitted it [i. e., the sacrifice] in order to instruct the living and those yet to be, so that they may make circumspect and fitting vows.... Jephthah achieved his victory not because of his vow, but because of God's just judgment. Indeed it would not have been proper, because of an insane vow, to suppress Israel."[42]

The tenor of this passage, too, is that Jephthah's deed was of preventive value as an example, but intrinsically he is condemned here as strongly as by John Chrysostom and Theodoret or perhaps even more strongly. What is of specific interest in the passage from Anastasius is the comparison with the sacrifice of Isaac. In unmistakable terms he points out the fundamental difference between the two sacrifices, while, on the other hand, the artist of our panel seems to suggest actions by two persons of equal standing in the graces of God by depicting both of them as haloed saints.

Yet one dissenting voice among the Church Fathers not only condones the deed of Jephthah and has high praise for his motivation, but actually draws a parallel between the sacrifice of the blood of Jephthah's own offspring and that of Christ's sacrifice, thus making it a prefiguration of the latter, as is implied by the placing of the painted panel in the bema. The dissenting Church Father is Ephraem, the Syrian, who, in his seventieth Nisibean hymn, lauds the act of Jephthah in these words:

"Praiseworthy was also the deed of Jephte, the vine-dresser who plucked the virginal grape and offered it to the master of the vineyard.

"He prevailed, offered his offspring, and he

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[40] J.-P. Migne, Patrologia Graeca, 49 (Paris, 1862), cols. 147, 148.
[41] Migne, PG, 80 (Paris, 1864), cols. 508–509.

[42] Migne, PG, 89 (Paris, 1865), cols. 580–581.

suppressed and ejected his love, and he became not insane in spite of his sorrow because his faith sustained him.

"The wine of death namely is yeast which is effervescent through the sorrow; with tears he made the drinkers drunk and with weeping, his guests.

"A very strong consolation was the great example of Jephte who with his sword offered the treasure of life to his Lord.

"His right arm Jephte stretched out and offered the sacrifice. The dove saw him in his sadness and gave him courage through her voice.

"Upright was the priest, who sacrificed with blood of his own offspring, so that he may be an example of his Lord, who sacrificed with his own blood."[43]

The typological parallel between the sacrifices of Jephthah and Christ was elaborated on shortly before Ephraem by another Syrian Church Father, Aphraates, who, about A.D. 344, wrote in his twenty-first Demonstration:

"Also Jephthah was persecuted, as Jesus was persecuted. Jephthah, his brethren drove out from the house of his father; and Jesus, His brethren drove out and lifted up and crucified. Jephthah through persecution arose as leader to his people; Jesus though persecuted arose and became King of the Nations. Jephthah vowed a vow and offered up his first-born daughter as a sacrifice, and Jesus was lifted up as a sacrifice to his Father for all the Gentiles."[44]

Of course, it cannot be proved that either of the two passages was the inspiration of the painter of the Sinai panel, yet it is by no means impossible. One can point to certain circumstances that make such an assumption likely, at least in the case of Ephraem. Not only were his works translated at a very early date from Syriac into Greek and appreciated in Greek monastic communities, but the library of St. Catherine's monastery still possesses today a considerable collection of Syriac books. There are more than 250, and they are mostly well-worn service books which could only have been used by a colony of Syrian monks. While the library has, no doubt, lost many books over the centuries, particularly its early ones, some of the writings of Ephraem are still preserved in Syriac as well as in Greek among its early codices. We can therefore presuppose a knowledge of this most popular Church Father in a monastery like St. Catherine's, where Syrian influence had been very strong indeed.

At the same time, the uniqueness of Jephthah's sacrifice in early Christian art, as well as the unfavorable comment on his deed by the majority of the Greek Church Fathers, may suggest that the Sinai panel is not a chance survival of a familiar subject, but, in all likelihood, a very rare representation in Early Christian art of what may well have been an unpopular story. As a typological theme, it never, for reasons explained above, could have gained the popularity of Isaac's sacrifice, with which it is coupled on the marble revetment of the apse of the Sinai church.[45]

[43] G. Bickell, *S. Ephraemi Syri Carmina Nisibena* (Leipzig, 1866), p. 216. Our translation is made from the Latin translation of the Syriac text. I am very much indebted to Prof. H. von Campenhausen of Heidelberg University, who has called my attention to this elucidating passage.

[44] This is the translation by John Gwynn in: *A Select Library of Nicene and post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd ser., ed. by Ph. Schaff and H. Wace, XIII, (1898), p. 397. I wish to thank Prof. Bruce Metzger of the Princeton Theological Seminary most cordially for having given me this valuable piece of information, which seems to indicate that the Syrian Church fathers took quite a

different view of the Jephthah episode than did the Greek fathers.

[45] Where the scene is indeed used in a typological connection, in the later mediaeval *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, the emphasis is placed entirely on Jephthah's daughter, whose virginity is likened to that of the Mother of God and who, therefore, is rendered with a crown, as is the Queen of Heaven: O. Lutz and P. Perdrizet, *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* (Leipzig, 1907), 1, p. 312 and 2, pl. x.
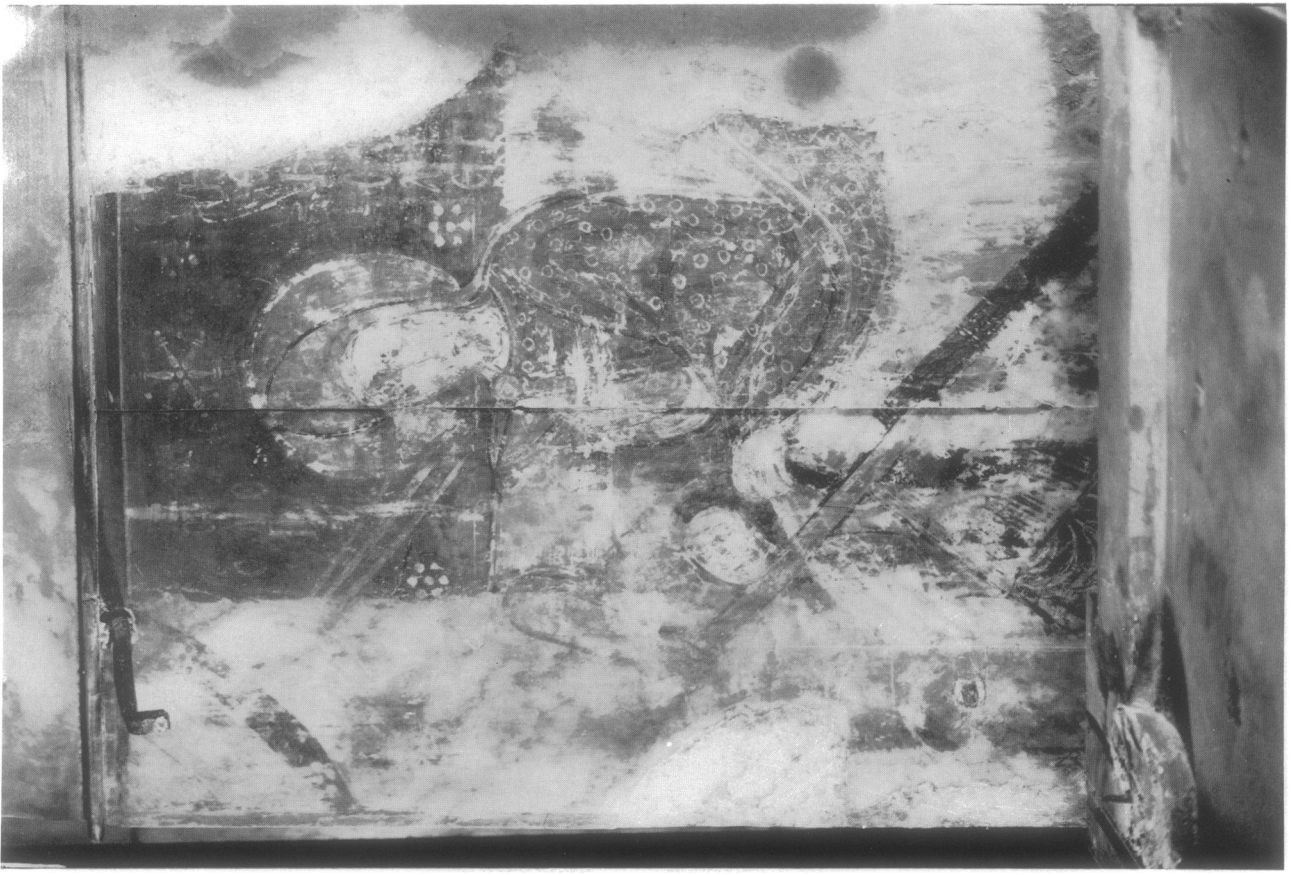
1. Bema, View into Apse
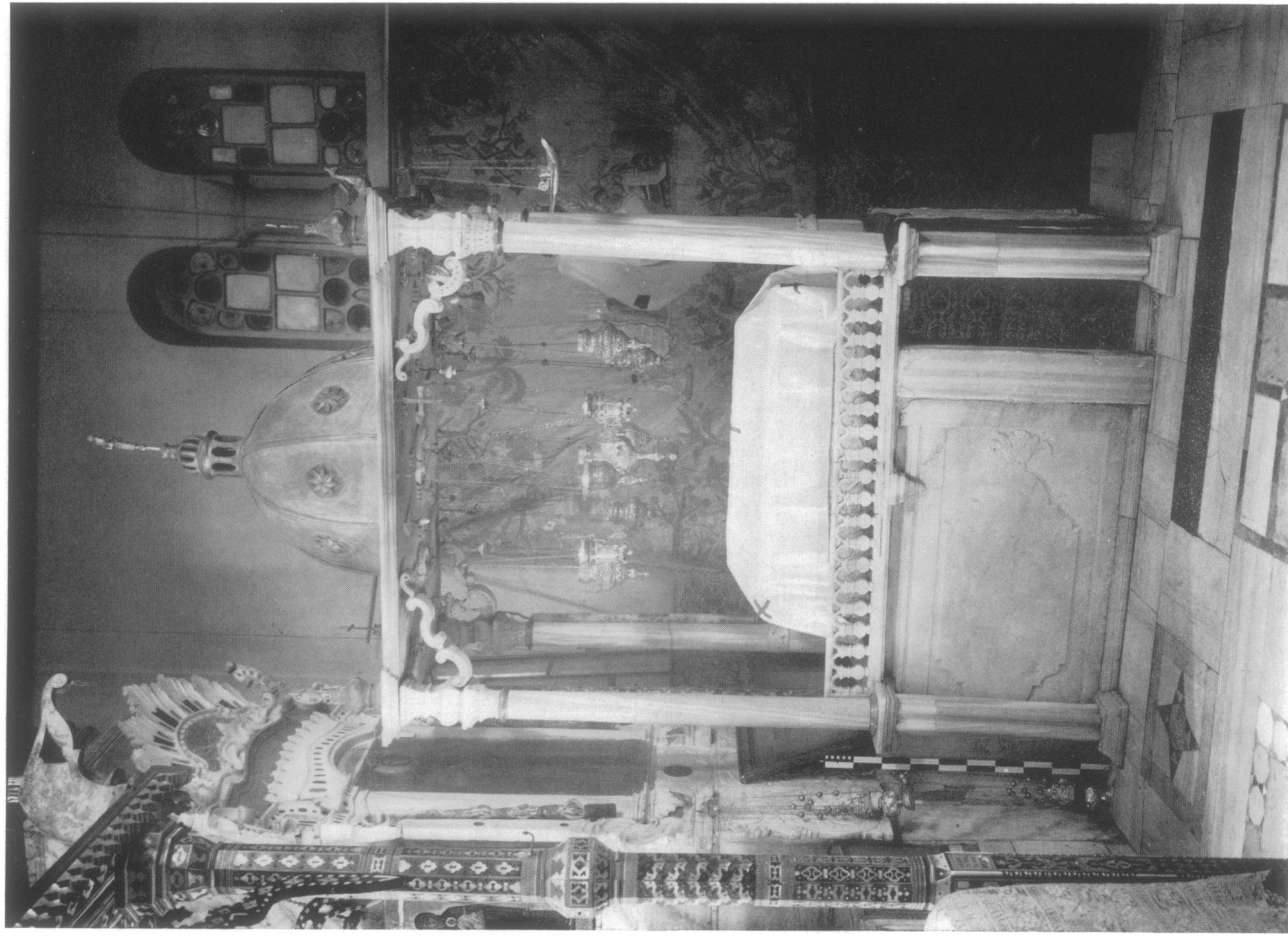
2. Bema. St. Catherine's Tomb

Mount Sinai. Church of St. Catherine's Monastery
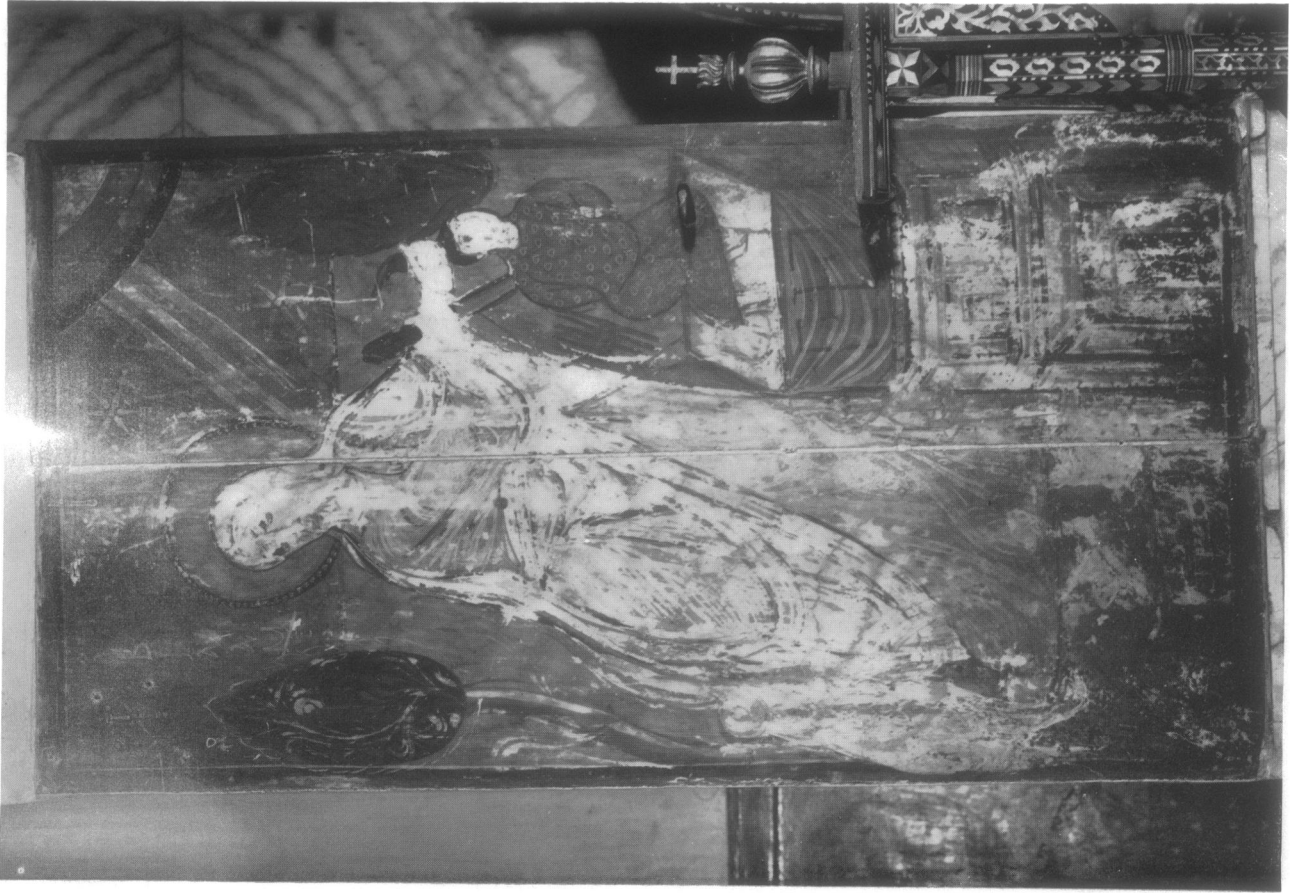
4. Church, Bema. The Sacrifice of Jephthah's Daughter, upper half

3. Church, Bema. The Sacrifice of Isaac

6.

5.

Church, Bema. The Sacrifice of Jephthah's Daughter, lower half

8. Mount Sinai. Icon, Virgin with Child

7. Church, Bema. The Moses of the Transfiguration Mosaic
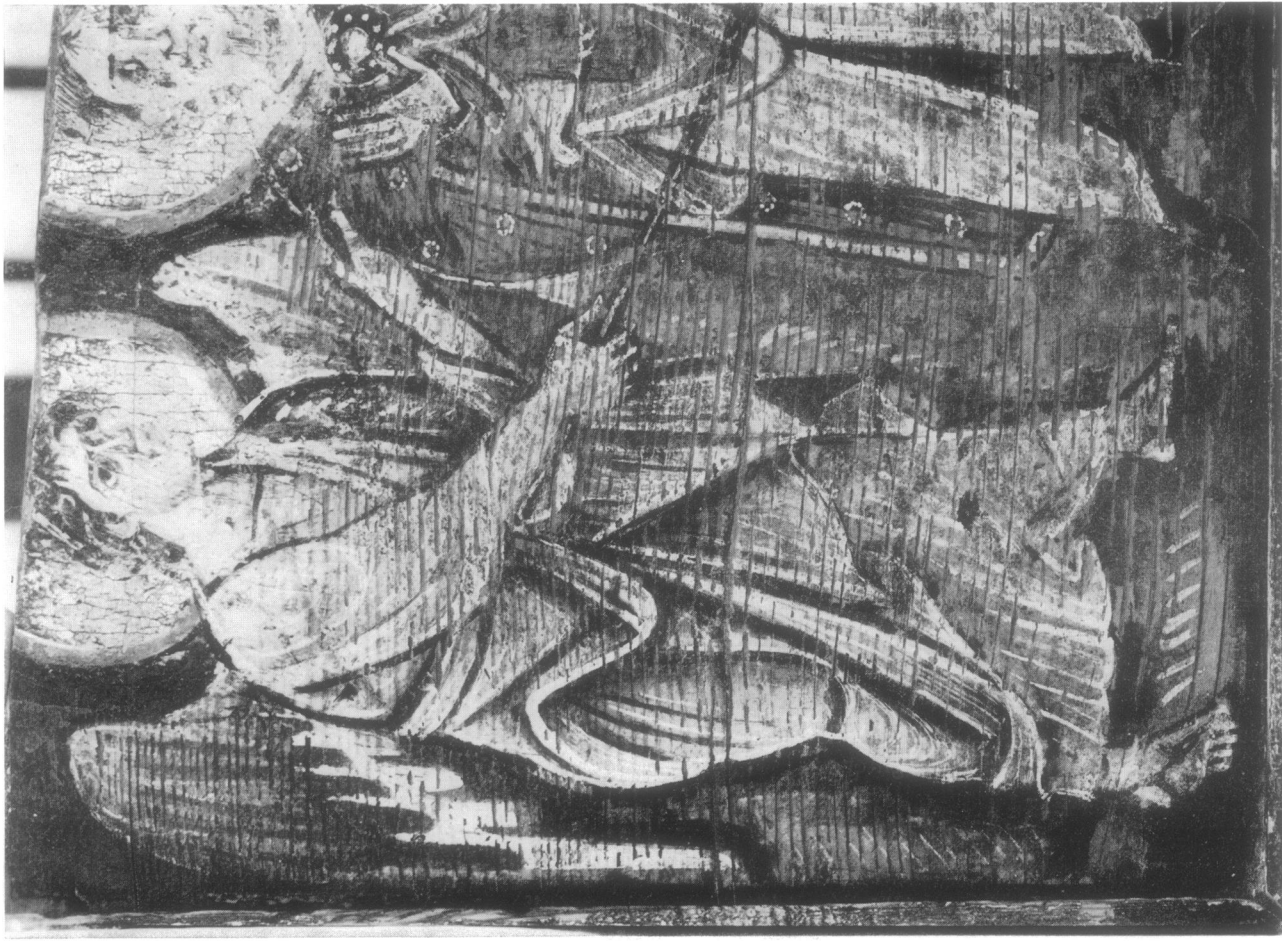
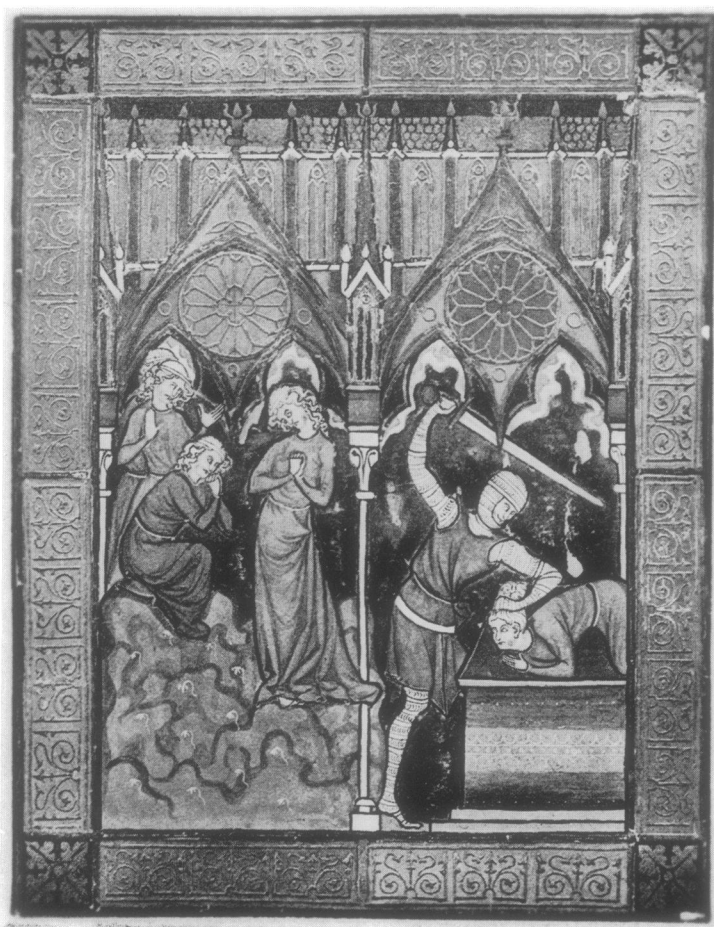10. Icon, The Three Hebrews, detail

Mount Sinai

9. Icon, Chairete

11. Munich, Staatsbibliothek. Clm. 14159, fol. 3ʳ (detail),
Sacrifice of Jephthah's Daughter

13. New York, Morgan Library. Cod. M. 638,
fol. 13ᵛ (detail), Sacrifice of Jephthah's Daughter

14. Paris, Bibliothèque d'Arsénal.
Cod. 5211, fol. 81ʳ (detail), Sacrifice of
Jephthah's Daughter

12. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale. Cod. lat. 10525, fol. 54ᵛ,
Sacrifice of Jephthah's Daughter

15. Olim Smyrna, Evangelical School. Cod. A.I.,
fol. 35ʳ, Sacrifice of Isaac